

DNR Report

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The past few months I have not had a lot of DNR wildlife management meetings. I did attend 2 deer meetings, an elk and a turkey meeting. Plus, I attended a DNR round table meeting in Madison with the Deputy Secretary of the DNR, which was also attended by other state organizations, either in person or via Zoom.

I will start by reporting about some of the information I received at the elk meeting. First, I want to say that I think elk reintroduction in the State of Wisconsin is a true testament that with cooperation from other outdoor agencies and the DNR, positive things can happen. The last day to apply for a chance for a 2024 elk harvest permit was May 31. There are 12 harvest permits in the state for the fall 2024 hunt. Four are valid for the Clam Lake herd elk management zone (EMZ) in northern Wisconsin and 4 are valid for the southern Black River Falls herd EMZ. Native Americans also have 4 harvest permits, good for the northern Clam Lake Elk EMZ. The drawing has been held and from what I can find out at this point no winner of a harvest permit has said they would be hunting with archery equipment. I hope and pray that the southern elk hunt is as safe, rewarding and productive as the northern hunts have been. There has been some chatter in the elk management committee about the future possibility of some harvest permits being issued for elk cows. No real timeline has been discussed, but it would be another chance to harvest an elk in Wisconsin when it does happen.

Turkeys are another success story for the state. We have been hunting turkeys in Wisconsin since 1983. That is 41 years of enjoyment by turkey hunters in Wisconsin. The spring 2024 season was good for hunters, with 50,435 bearded birds harvested. That is one of the higher harvests in the state's history. A couple of reasons for more birds being harvested this spring was that in 2023 the state saw some very good poult reproduction, due to a warm, dry spring. We had an excellent acorn crop last fall, combined with the fact that the state had very little snow cover statewide. Turkeys were able to access those acorns all winter and not exert too much energy. This made for lots of turkeys on the landscape. Birds shot this spring also weighed a little more because of the acorn crop. Many hunters also stated that beard lengths were exceptional this year because the beards did not have to drag in the deeper snows the state is accustomed to. Asian bird flu was one of the reasons why it seemed turkey populations were not growing anymore in the state, but another thought is that the state may have reached ultimate carrying capacity, reducing places for turkeys to expand to. Predictions for this fall hunting season should be good for adult birds because of the abundance seen this spring. At this time, it is too early to tell what kind of poult production we will have, but by signs I have seen it may be down some this year because of the continual wet and cool conditions we have been having throughout the state. Time will tell.

By predictions of the DNR biologist, deer hunting in the southern two thirds of the state, it looks like hunters will be able to see ample number of deer, if they put in the time and effort. For the northern forest deer management zone, I don't really know for sure who can tell what is going to happen this fall. As of this writing, the CDAC's and DNR wildlife biologists have made recommendations to the policy team and the NRB. We will have to wait and see what they come up with for season

structures and antlerless harvest permits. Last season, the same as with bears, the deer were eating acorns and because of the warm weather, they had no need to move during daylight hours. Is that the partial reason for a lower harvest in the north? I am not sure of that.

The bear hunting this fall looks like it could be very promising. First, I can't really believe the state could have another super acorn crop, which totally disrupted where bears were during the 2023 hunting season. Second, bait sitters and other methods will start the season first this year. History predominately shows that whatever method starts first usually harvests slightly more bears than the group with the second opener. I have been guiding bear hunters for 40 plus years and by the records I keep, the earlier you can hunt the higher success rate you will have. A couple reasons are that every bear shot reduces opportunities for whichever group starts last; and second, bears tend to gravitate to natural foods over artificial foods we put out at our baits. The weight of bears harvested has decreased slightly over the past few years, with many claiming that some hunters are less selective because of the wait time to receive a harvest permit. This is probably true, especially amongst bait sitters.

For those of you who are lucky enough to receive a bobcat harvest permit for this fall, good luck! Bobcats are becoming more plentiful throughout the state. I have shot two bobcats with a bow. To me this is one of the more challenging and rewarding hunts we as Wisconsinites can enjoy. Hunting bobcats with archery equipment does take some luck, effort and patience.

I took a quick glance at some of the citizen resolutions that were introduced at this year's Spring Hearings, and in my opinion we as hunters need to make sure our voices are heard to protect the hunting rights we are used to having in this state. We will all have to keep a close watch at what questions are on 2025 Spring Hearing questionnaire in April.

I hope and pray everyone has safe, enjoyable and successful hunts this coming fall.

Remember to take another person with you hunting and let them enjoy what you have had the privilege of doing for years.